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SUBJ: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PRIME MINISTER KIRK'S DEATH

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1. SUCCESSION TO PRIME MINISTERSHIP FOLLOWING PRIME MINISTER KIRK'S DEATH WILL INVOLVE CONSIDERABLE IN-FIGHTING WITHIN LABOUR PARTY AS THERE ARE FOUR OR FIVE POSSIBLE CONTENDERS. KIRK TOWERED ABOVE REST OF CABINET AND, BELIEVING HE HAD NO REASON TO DO SO, DID NOTHING ABOUT GROOMING A SUCCESSOR.

2. FIVE MAJOR CANDIDATES FOR JOB ARE MINISTER OF FINANCE BILL ROWLING; MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY WARREN FREER; ATTORNEY GENERAL FINALLY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HUGH WATT, AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE ARTHUR FAULKNER (NAMED MINISTER OF WORKS LAST WEEK). BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THEIR STRONG AND WEAK POINTS FOLLOWS:

HUGH WATT-- WATT DOES NOT HAVE A STRONG PERSONALITY AND HAS NEVER REALLY BEEN CONSIDERED PRIME MNINSTERIAL MATERIAL.

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HOWEVER, DURING PAST SEVERAL MONTHS HE HAS SHOULDERED BURDEN

OF RUNNING GOVERNMENT WHEN KIRK WAS INCAPACITATED. WATT IS THE

ONLY MEMBER OF CABINET WHO HAS BEEN EXPOSED TO ACROSS THE
BOARD PROBLEMS OF GOVERNMENT. DESIRE TO SHOW CONTINUITY IN

LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION WILL ALSO WORK IN WATT'S FAVOR. WE
UNDERSTAND THE DIVORCE SUIT IN WHICH HE WAS NAMED CORESPONDENT
HAS BEEN DROPPED AND, DUE TO NEW ZEALAND LIBEL LAW, NO MENTION
OF IT HAS BEEN MADE IN THE PRESS.

W.E. ROWLING-- ROWLING IS PROBABLY STRONGEST CANDIDATE
TO TAKE OVER LEADERSHIP. HE IS AN ABLE AND CONFIDENT INDIVIDUAL
AND A SHREWD POLITICAN. AS MINISTER OF FINANCE HE HAS BEEN IN
A POSITION TO ESTABLISH DIRECT LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH
EVERY LABOUR MP. ROWLING IS FRIENDLY TOWARD THE US. HE SPENT
A YEAR IN SEATTLE ON A FULBRIGHT GRANT IN 1955-56 AND RETURNED
TO THE US IN 1967 ON A LEADER GRANT.

WARREN FREER-- NUMBER THREE MAN IN THE KIRK GOVERNMENT,
FREER ENJOYS CONSIDERABLE POLLITICAL SUPPORT FROM THE LABOUR
PARTY'S LEFT WING. NOW SLIGHTLY MELLOWED BY AGE, FREER HAS BEEN
AND CONTINUES ON THE RADICAL LEFT FRINGE. HE HAS LONG SUPPORTED
TIES WITH THE PRC AND HAS VISITED PEKING ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS.
THESE TIES WITH THE LEFT MAY MAKE FREER UNACCEPTABLE TO MOST
MODERATE MEMBERS OF THE LABOUR CAUCUS HE ALSO SUFFERS FROM
NOT HAVING BEEN ABLE TO MAKE
PRICE CONTROLS WORK DURING THE PAST YEAR. FREER HAS BEEN
LIKENED TO AUSTRALIA'S DEPUTY PM DR. CAIRNS.

MARTIN FINALLY--LIKE FREER, FINALLY IS ON THE PARTY'S LEFT.
HE IS AN INTELLIGENT AND HARD WORKING INDIVIDUAL, BUT IS
OFTEN CRITICIZED AS BEING TOO INTELLECTUAL AND NOT
SUFFICIENTLY PRAGMATIC.

ARTHUR FAULKNER--FAULKNER IS A DARK HORSE IN THE RACE
FOR PRIME MINISTER. HE HAS A GREAT DEAL OF TALENT AND
ABILITY, BUT HAS NOT HAD THE SORT OF RESPONSIBILITIES IN
CABINET THAT WOULD MAKE HIM A NATURAL CONTENDER. OF THE
CONTENDERS, FAULKNER WOULD PROBABLY BE THE MOST FRIENDLY
TOWARD THE US.

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3. AS FAR AS EMBASSY CAN DETERMINE, NO DECISION HAS BEEN
TAKEN AS TO WHEN LABOUR PARTY CAUCUS WILL CHOSE NEW LEADER.
UNLIKELY, HOWEVER, IT WILL TAKE PLACE PRIOR TO PM KIRKS
FUNERAL. (PARTY LEADER WILL BE CHOSEN BY LABOUR PARLIAMENTARY
CAUCUS. FOLLOWING SELECTION OF PM, USUAL PROCEDURE, AND ONE
LIKELY TO BE FOLLOWED IN THIS CASE, IS FOR CAUCUS TO THEN CAST
BALLOTS FOR MEMBERS OF CABINET. PM ALLOTS PORTFOLIOS AS

HE DESIRES TO THOSE ELECTED BY CABINET.) MOST MP'S HAVE GONE HOME FOR THE WEEKEND, BUT WILL PROBABLY BE BACK IN WELLINGTON SOMETIME TODAY. THOSE MEMEBERS IN TOWN HAVE BEEN MEETING TO DISCUSS COURSES OF ACTION.

4. TRADITIONALLY, PRIME MINISTER HAS ALSO HELD FOREIGN AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO. OF THE CONTENDERS LISTED ABOVE, ROWLING AND WATT HAVE HAD LITTLE INTEREST OR EXPERIENCE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MIGHT BE EXPECTED TO GIVE THE PORTFOLIO TO SOMEONE ELSE, PERHAPS FAULKNER, IF THEY WERE TO TAKE OVER LEADERSHIP. FREER AND FINALLY WOULD NOT RPT NOT BE EXPECTED TO CARRY OUT FOREIGN POLICY AS FAVORABLE TO US AS DID KIRK. WE WOULD HAVE TO FACE POSSIBILITY THAT FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THEM COULD LOOK SIMILAR TO THAT OF AUSTRALIA TODAY. FAULKNER IS THE STRONGEST LABOUR SUPPORTER OF SEATO AND ANZUS AND COULD BE EXPECTED TO CARRY ON FOREIGN POLICY LINE SIMILAR TO KIRK'S.

5. WITH NO OBVIOUS SUCCESSOR TO KIRK, THERE WILL BE CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF JOCKEYING FOR POSITION IN THE LABOUR PARTY. LABOUR HAS 22 SEAT MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT, HOWEVER, AND THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF ELECTIONS BEING FORCED ON LABOUR BEFORE THEY ARE DUE IN NOVEMBER 1975. KIRK WAS LABOUR'S BEST VOTE GETTER AND HIS PASSING WILL OBVIOUSLY AFFECT THE PARTY'S CHANCES NEXT YEAR. WITHIN PARLIAMENT THE VERY STRONG WHIP SYSTEM WILL INSURE THAT LABOUR DOES NOT FALL APART BEFORE OPPOSITION CHALLENGES.

6. SELECTION OF EITHER FINALLY OR FREER AS PRIME MINISTER WOULD CONSIDERABLY ENHANCE THE STATUS OF THE LEFT IN THE LABOUR PARTY. ELEVATION OF ROWLING, WATT OR FAULKNER WOULD PROBABLY RESULT IN CONTINUATION OF SOMETHING APPROACHING STATUS QUO IN INTRA-PARTY POLITICS. TRADE UNION MOVEMENT WOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE ACCEPTING ANY OF THE MEN NAMED ABOVE

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EXCEPT FINALLY WHOM THEY FEEL IS AGAINST THEM DUE TO HIS SUPPORT OF THE USE OF INJUNCTIONS AGAINST ORGANIZED LABOUR.

7. COMMENT: NORMAN KIRK DOMINATED THE LABOUR PARTY FOR NEARLY TEN YEARS. AS A RESULT IT IS GOING TO TAKE SOME TIME FOR PARTY TO REESTABLISH ITSELF WITH A NEW MAN AT THE TOP. WHOEVER HE IS, HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO EXERT THE SAME INFLUENCE THAT KIRK DID DURING THE PAST 21 MONTHS AS PRIME MINISTER. OVERALL ATTENTION TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS MAY SUFFER AS THE NEW PRIME MINISTER SEEKS TO SOLIDIFY HIS POSITION WITHIN THE PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT. DESPITE THIS, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM WILL STILL HOLD TRUE, I.E., THAT NO NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT CAN GO VERY FAR IN LOOSENING TIES WITH THE US. WE SHOULD KEEP THESE FACTS VERY MUCH IN MIND OVER THE NEXT SIX TO TWELVE MONTHS OF TRANSITION.

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